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FIFTH REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Security Council, by paragraph 3 of its resolution 1230 (1999) of 26 February 1999, decided to review every 45 days, on the basis of reports from the Secretary-General, the mandate of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) in light of the progress achieved towards implementation of commitments made by the President of the Central African Republic to the Secretary-General in his letter of 23 January 1999.

2. In paragraph 18 of resolution 1230 (1999), the Council requested me to submit the first report by 15 April 1999. The present report therefore describes developments in the Central African Republic since my last report was submitted on 29 January 1999 (S/1999/98).

II. POLITICAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

3. As described in paragraphs 2 and 3 of my report to the Council of 29 January 1999, the legislative elections of 22 November and 13 December 1998 resulted in the almost equal division of the 109 seats in the National Assembly between the Mouvence Présidentielle and the opposition. The resulting impasse led to a protracted dispute over the distribution of posts in the Bureau of the National Assembly. The main issue between the parties concerned the first vice-presidency of the National Assembly. Although, at the 3984th meeting of the Security Council, on 26 February 1999, the Permanent Representative of the Central African Republic announced that the post had been offered to the opposition, the Permanent Representative later withdrew his statement. However, the return of opposition legislators to the Assembly on 2 March, and their participation in the seven standing commissions of the National Assembly has somewhat helped to reduce tensions. Since then, the opposition has actively participated in the elaboration of several draft laws fundamental to the reform process.

4. The new Government, led by Prime Minister Anicet Georges Dologuele, who was nominated by President Ange-Félix Patassé on 15 January 1999, has been

functioning with considerable cohesion. Prime Minister Dologuele took advantage of the initial opposition boycott of the Government to include within it a number of members of civil society, as well as technocrats without strong party affiliation.

5. In view of the concerns expressed by members of the Security Council at the time of the adoption of resolution 1230 (1999), my Special Representative has stressed to President Patassé the importance of implementing the commitments he has made to me, notably in his letters dated 23 January 1999 and 8 January 1998. My Special Representative also stressed that the continuing presence of MINURCA in the Central African Republic would depend on the Security Council's assessment of progress, on the basis of reports I would submit every 45 days, beginning with the present report. The President and the Prime Minister assured my Special Representative that they would make every effort to fulfil their undertaking and meet the deadlines established by the Security Council for the implementation of various aspects of the reform process.

Electoral Process

6. Though the 1998 legislative elections were generally considered free and fair, subsequent reports by MINURCA and by the Mixed and Independent Electoral Commission (CEMI), which organized the elections, identified a number of shortcomings and proposed recommendations for the improvement of the electoral process. These proposed improvements included the speedy establishment of a smaller and more efficient CEMI, the thorough revision of the electoral roll and the modification of the Electoral Code.

7. On 9 March, a team of United Nations electoral experts visited Bangui to assess preparations for the presidential elections and to draw up, in cooperation with the Government, a concept of operations and timetable for United Nations action in support of the elections. The team leader met with President Patassé during the visit.

8. The team found that the establishment of a proper electoral roll would ideally require a fresh census of voters to be taken. However, this would appear to be too time-consuming and costly a process to be feasible. The matter will have to be decided by CEMI at an early date.

9. On 2 April 1999, President Patassé signed a decree establishing a new CEMI with 27 members, including nine from the Presidential majority, nine from the opposition and others, including independents and members of government ministries. The decree took into account many of the agreements reached in discussions among the political parties, some of which were presided over by my Special Representative.

10. Though the new CEMI is generally considered to be more efficient and politically balanced than its predecessor, opposition supporters have objected to the provision of the decree that retained local sous-préfets as chairmen of the local CEMI bodies. This is contrary to one of the inter-party agreements, which had proposed instead that President Patassé should appoint neutral personalities to head the local bodies. For its part, the Government asserts that it is difficult to identify qualified "neutral" persons in the

sub-prefectures, and that the chairmen of local CEMI bodies must be in a position to facilitate the necessary logistical, transportation and communications operations required to support the conduct of the election in the countryside.

11. My Special Representative has devoted particular attention to assisting the parties to resolve this question, which is blocking the inauguration of the new CEMI, to enable it to commence playing its central role in deciding on the dates, the electoral list and the budget for the election. MINURCA, along with the donors, has appealed to the Government and the opposition to revive their dialogue in a constructive spirit that would permit agreement to be reached as a matter of urgency. In this connection, MINURCA is assuring the opposition that the international electoral observers to be deployed starting next month (see paras. 14 and 15 below) will also pay close attention to the functioning of CEMI at the local level to ensure the impartiality of the local chairmen.

12. On 9 April, my Special Representative and the major donors, the representatives of China, Egypt, France, Japan, the United States of America, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union, met with President Patassé, the Prime Minister and other ministers to address this problem and to impress upon the President their misgivings. In particular, the donors expressed regret that the presidential decree on CEMI had failed to take into account some of the recommendations reached by consensus by all political groups in the country, particularly with regard to the appointment of the sous-préfets as heads of the local CEMI bodies. The donors called for the resumption of dialogue with a view to reaching an acceptable compromise on CEMI, as well as on the electoral code, and emphasized the need to avoid interference by the executive in the management of the electoral process.

United Nations role in the presidential elections

13. In preparation for the presidential elections, MINURCA, in cooperation with United Nations electoral experts, has prepared a plan to provide assistance to and international monitoring and verification of the electoral process. The plan envisages the deployment to a total of eight permanent and two temporary sites in the countryside of some selected troops of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), as well as MINURCA military and civilian elements. In all, a total of three FACA companies, comprising altogether 360 men, will need to be selected and trained for this purpose. A budget proposal based on the plan is being prepared.

14. Owing to the delay in the establishment of CEMI and, consequently, in key decisions such as the date of the elections, some elements of the United Nations plan remain to be finalized. It is, however, envisaged that the United Nations would deploy 26 medium-term observers three months before polling day, that is, starting in the month of May. It is further envisaged that up to 150 observers would be deployed for the first round of the elections and up to 200 during the second round. In accordance with the Constitution of the Central African Republic, the first and second round of the election should take place in August and September respectively.

15. The sites at which the observers would be deployed have already been identified as follows, permanent sites: Berberati, Bouar, Bangassou, Bambari, Kagabandoro, Bossangoa, Bozoum and Mobaye; temporary sites: Nedel and Birao. At each of the permanent sites MINURCA will deploy 32 personnel, including 28 military. In order to create a secure environment, it would also be necessary to deploy 30 FACA troops at each of the permanent sites, with a further 120 FACA troops deployed in Bangui as a rapid reaction element. Ten MINURCA personnel will be deployed at each of the two temporary sites

16. Additional international personnel and logistical resources will also be required. I intend to request Canada and Egypt to deploy 84 additional military communications and logistics personnel. Each site will need to be provided with vehicles, including some heavy trucks during the deployment phase, and additional helicopters and cargo aircraft will also be necessary. I intend to proceed with the necessary arrangements on the understanding that the final plan for the United Nations role in the elections, coordinated with UNDP, will be contained in my next report to the Council, when a further assessment will be made of the preparations made so far by the Government and CEMI. In the meantime, the MINURCA electoral unit is now in the process of being re-established.

Human rights

17. Although the human rights situation in the Central African Republic has continued to be generally stable, human rights education programmes to disseminate the culture of peace and tolerance are expected to acquire increasing importance as the electoral campaign progresses. In this connection, a human rights information and awareness campaign has been conducted on Radio MINURCA in French and Sango. Human rights education also continued as part of the curriculum of the MINURCA civilian police component (CIVPOL) training for the National Police and the Gendarmerie.

18. Reports of human rights abuses committed by security forces, particularly by the presidential guard (Special Defence Force of the Republican Institutions (FORSDIR)), continue to be received. MINURCA has drawn the provisions of resolution 1230 (1999) concerning the limitation of the role of FORSDIR to the Government's attention. Furthermore, consideration is being given to extending the human rights instruction now provided by CIVPOL to police officers and gendarmes to members of the armed forces, including FORSDIR, in the context of restructuring (see section IV below). In the meantime, the Government has taken some tentative steps to curtail abuses by withdrawing FORSDIR from roadblock duties. MINURCA has made clear to the authorities its wish to see gendarmes and police officers who have completed the CIVPOL retraining course to be posted wherever possible to replace FORSDIR.

19. MINURCA has also received several allegations of violations of freedom of the press, including the search by police of newspaper offices, as well as limitation of access to the media imposed on opposition party members. On being informed by MINURCA of these allegations, the Prime Minister invited the opposition parties to discuss with him modalities and guidelines for equitable access to the media. In this connection, the appointment of the members of the Haut Conseil de Communication, which is responsible for ensuring the freedom and

transparency of information and communications, should improve the situation. The creation, on 31 March 1999, of the High Commission for Human Rights, under the supervision of the Prime Minister, to coordinate national human rights matters is intended to replace the Human Rights Ministry, which was abolished in January 1999.

20. The human rights section of MINURCA, which currently comprises two staff members, has also held several meetings with government officials to discuss the conduct of a national seminar on the impact of human rights in the reconstruction process, to be followed by the adoption of a national plan of action on human rights. The Government has welcomed the seminar, which is scheduled to take place in May with funding provided by UNDP.

Information

21. Since the adoption of resolution 1230 (1999), MINURCA's public information activities have intensified in order to explain to the people of the Central African Republic the key elements of the reform process, as well as the purpose and activities of the United Nations in the country. To this end, Radio MINURCA broadcasts regular addresses by my Special Representative and his senior staff, as well as a weekly press conference.

22. The role of Radio MINURCA will become increasingly vital as the presidential elections approach. As was the case during the legislative elections, radio will be the main source of voter education and electoral information.

23. The MINURCA Information Unit has held discussions with the Ministry of Information with a view to working out further areas of cooperation on matters of mutual interest between MINURCA and the host authorities. Seminars are being planned for national journalists to improve their knowledge of the United Nations system, particularly in the area of peacekeeping operations. At the same time, a sensitization campaign aimed at local educational institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been initiated. It will also be necessary to significantly extend the range of Radio MINURCA, which at this point cannot broadcast to the whole of the country.

III. MILITARY AND SECURITY ASPECTS

24. The Central African Republic and its capital, Bangui, have remained calm during the reporting period. So far, concerns arising from the possible spill-over of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been allayed. According to information available to MINURCA, the parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have made no further use of the territory or the airports of the Central African Republic, thus reducing the serious risk of an extension of the conflict to its territory.

25. MINURCA has put into effect a new deployment plan in Bangui with improved accommodation for the troops. Redeployment will be completed by the end of April.

Disarmament

26. Although the Ministry for Disarmament of the Central African Republic is undertaking missions into the interior of the country to extend disarmament operations, there has recently been a reduction in the volume of arms and ammunition collected. MINURCA is discussing with UNDP a possible increase in the financial support it has been providing to the disarmament programme.

27. MINURCA has destroyed a large quantity of ammunition and explosives collected during the disarmament process. Since the adoption of resolution 1159 (1998) on 27 March 1998, more than 20,000 cartridges and some 1,000 pieces of ordnance have been destroyed. In the case of weapons that temporarily remain in MINURCA custody, it is pertinent to mention that the heavy arms, in general, are in good condition and that most were looted from the national armoury. However, most of the 1,470 small arms recovered are in poor condition. I strongly believe that those considered unserviceable should be destroyed without further delay, and intend to arrange for their destruction in consultation with the Government.

Civilian police component

28. CIVPOL has continued its training programme for the police and gendarmerie of the Central African Republic, with a view to strengthening their capacity and effectiveness within the framework of the restructuring of the National Police and security forces. So far, 225 gendarmes and 159 police officers have fully completed their training. In addition, 44 gendarmes and 172 police officers are currently pursuing United Nations-supervised training courses in the National Training Centre for the Gendarmerie and the National Police College respectively. Those who had completed their training in the earlier courses have been deployed in the interior of the country to strengthen public security. Within the framework of the restructuring process for the security forces, a plan has been elaborated in accordance with the general global restructuring programme as defined by the joint Government/MINURCA committee on restructuring. It is expected that the plan will soon be approved along with a calendar for implementation and follow-up action. It will be important to ensure that arrangements are in place to ensure the necessary funding for the equipment and infrastructure required for the police to operate in accordance with their training. Without effective follow-up, there is a risk that CIVPOL's training efforts will be wasted.

IV. RESTRUCTURING AND DEMOBILIZATION OF THE ARMED FORCES

Restructuring

29. Four draft laws on the restructuring of the armed forces, prepared by a joint Government/MINURCA commission, were submitted to the National Assembly for adoption on 31 March. The drafts concern the basic concept of national defence; the operational organization of national defence; the creation of a Supreme Council on National Defence; and crisis management. In accordance with the accelerated procedure put in place for the adoption of the draft laws, voting in the National Assembly is expected to begin during the week of 12 to 16 April.

30. Following the completion of the texts, a MINURCA technical committee has been working on some concrete elements of technical assistance and advice to the authorities of the Central African Republic responsible for restructuring the armed forces.

Demobilization

31. The National Programme for the Demobilization and Reintegration of the armed forces is now about to enter the demobilization phase, for which supplementary financial resources will be needed, including from international donors. On 23 February, my Special Representative convened a meeting with the officials responsible for the programme and with UNDP in order to explore possible sources of funding. Moreover, PNDR, in collaboration with some NGOs, has begun work on a project to facilitate a return to civilian life of the first group of demobilized soldiers, including a sensitization campaign. MINURCA has also been instrumental in establishing a commission on restructuring to assist the Government to formulate projects as part of the demobilization process.

V. ECONOMIC ASPECTS

32. From 16 to 26 February 1999, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission visited to resume discussions for the mid-term review under the first annual enhanced structural adjustment facility (ESAF) arrangement. The arrangement was approved by the Fund's Executive Board in July 1998, but the previous mission, in October 1998, could not complete the review discussions because of the slippages in the implementation of the programme, both in the financial and the structural areas. Staff from the World Bank and the African Development Bank participated in most of the policy discussions with the authorities.

33. Progress has been made in recent months in implementing the programme and meeting the targets that had been set for end-September 1998. In particular, the authorities have completed the liquidation of several public enterprises; finalized the validation of domestic debt and arrears; made key strides in the banking sector restructuring (sale of the Banque internationale pour le Centrafrique (BICA) and issuance of tenders for the privatization of the Union bancaire en Afrique centrale (UBAC)); and completed the closure of all but one of the commercial banks that have ceased activity. The conclusion of the review discussions remains subject to several prior conditions, including confirmation of the improved control over public finance and finalization of key structural reform measures. Specifically, these include an assessment of financial performance through end-March 1999, especially concerning government revenue collection and the servicing of non-reschedulable external debt; finalization of the sale of the petroleum distribution network (privatization of the State oil company, PETROCA); and the adoption of measures to address the projected deficit of the cotton sector.

34. The protocol on the privatization of PETROCA was signed on 11 March 1999 between the Government and the oil companies Elf Total and Shell. The annex containing the mechanism determining retail consumer prices acceptable to all parties, i.e. the Government, the new owner and the consumers at large, is being worked out. Furthermore, the law on privatization is to be amended in

Parliament to bring the PETROCA protocol into application. The completion of the privatization of PETROCA is expected to take place at the end of May.

35. To support the authorities in their adjustment and reform efforts, IMF has provided technical assistance in the fiscal area. Three technical assistance missions visited Bangui in 1998 and 1999, and provided detailed recommendations on ways to improve government revenue collection performance (both in the tax and customs administrations), and to prepare for the introduction of a value added tax, in replacement of the present turnover tax, on 1 July 2000.

36. Recent data supplied by the government authorities to IMF suggest that a certain amount of progress is under way, both with respect to fiscal performance and the privatization of PETROCA. In addition, a package of measures in the cotton sector is expected to be announced soon. If all required conditions are met by the end of April 1999, a report could be submitted soon thereafter to the IMF Executive Board, for consideration in mid-May. In turn, a successful conclusion of the mid-term review under the enhanced structural adjustment facility arrangement could also unblock additional programme assistance from the World Bank (under a possible structural adjustment credit) and, at a later stage, subject to the clearance of debt payments arrears, from the African Development Bank.

VI. OBSERVATIONS

37. The Government of the Central African Republic continues to make some progress in carrying out the reforms it has pledged to make, but progress has been slow. Though the situation remains calm and the country remains an island of relative stability in the region, intense distrust among the country's political leaders persists while the economic and social situation remains precarious.

38. In section IV of my report of 29 January (S/1999/98), I outlined the main steps the Government was expected to take in order to demonstrate adherence to the commitments made to me by President Patassé. Of these, some have been partially achieved. They include the participation of the opposition in the National Assembly; the submission for adoption by the Assembly of draft laws on the restructuring of the armed forces; and some progress towards privatization, particularly in the case of the state oil company PETROCA.

39. Nonetheless, further action is urgently required to bring these issues to a satisfactory conclusion, especially the early adoption and speedy implementation of the draft laws on restructuring and the conclusion of the nationalization process in respect of PETROCA. The more effective collection of government revenue and the continued regular payment of salaries are also urgently necessary in order to fulfil the requirements of the international financial institutions.

40. I note the withdrawal of units of FORSDIR from roadblock duties, pursuant to the request made by the Security Council in paragraph 12 (b) of its resolution 1230 (1999). However, since complaints of FORSDIR transgressions continue to be received, I call on the Government, without delay, to take the

further action necessary to ensure that FORSDIR is excluded from all police and law-and-order functions. These should be performed by the police, who are receiving human rights and other training from CIVPOL. MINURCA will also accelerate the selection of suitable FACA personnel and their training for election-related duties.

41. The imminent adoption of the laws on the restructuring of the armed forces is a major step in the right direction. Though the Government has made budgetary provision in the 1999 budget for the restructuring programme, it will remain heavily dependent on donors for the funds necessary to complete restructuring. I therefore renew my appeal to donors to contribute to this important process, which will help to stabilize the security situation in the Central African Republic and in the subregion as a whole, as well as during the conduct of the presidential elections later this year. I further wish to make a strong appeal for contributions to support the Central African police force in order to allow its officers to put the training provided by CIVPOL to good use.

42. Some progress has been made with respect to the forthcoming presidential elections scheduled to take place in August/September. The decree on the creation of CEMI is to be welcomed, and the streamlining of its membership is a positive development. However, the late start in inaugurating the new CEMI has delayed all the resulting decisions regarding funding, the revision of the electoral register, practical and logistical preparations and even the date of polling. At the same time, the objections expressed by the opposition concerning local control of CEMI by sous-préfets is likely to cause further friction. There is therefore an urgent need for the Government and CEMI to follow up the action taken so far by advancing their electoral plans and preparations as rapidly as possible, while ensuring full transparency.

43. In the economic sphere, I note the steps taken towards the privatization of some State-run enterprises, including PETROCA, the reorganization of the Finance Ministry, the restructuring of the banking sector and the efforts being made to improve the Government's revenue position in order to ensure the timely payment of wages and debt servicing. The Bretton Woods institutions will continue to monitor closely progress made and, pending the fulfilment of several conditions, IMF could consider the disbursement of a second tranche under the first annual enhanced structural adjustment facility arrangement in May. The World Bank might also consider implementing a new structural adjustment credit some time this year, if certain conditions are met. My Special Representative will continue to apply pressure in this important area, drawing as well on the support of UNDP, IMF and the World Bank to maximize the impact of economic programmes.

44. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to my Special Representative, Oluyemi Adeniji, for his efforts to help resolve the persistent crises facing the Central African Republic. My thanks also go to the Force Commander, General Barthélémy Ratanga (Gabon), and to all the civilian and military staff of MINURCA. In this context, I would also like to express my appreciation to the troop-contributing countries for the cooperation they have displayed during the rotation of military personnel.

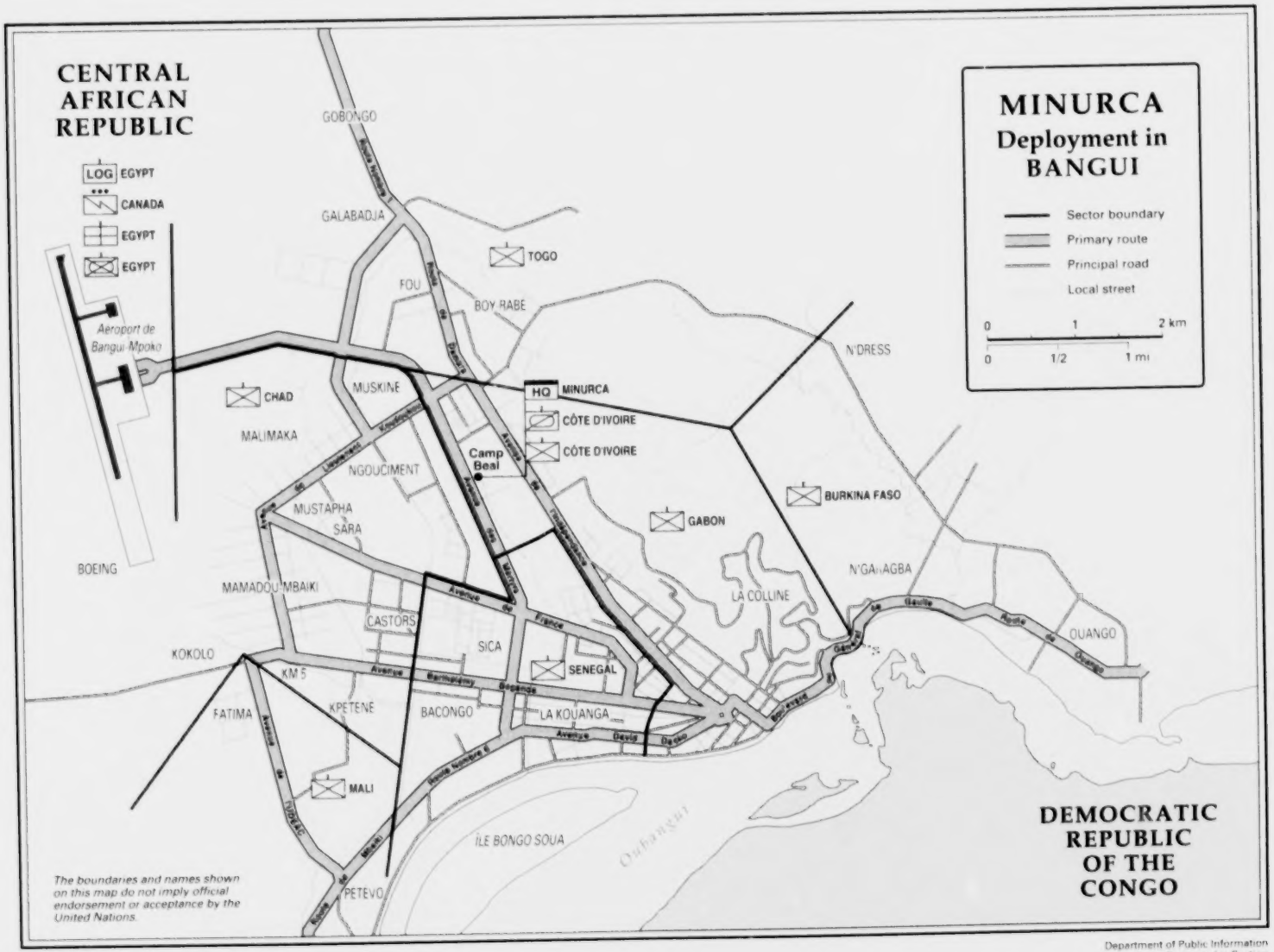
Annex

United Nations Mission in Central African Republic: contributions as at 9 April 1999

Country	Staff observers	Civilian police observers	Support unit	Troops	Total
Benin	-	2	-	-	2
Burkina Faso	6	-	-	120	126
Cameroon	-	1	-	-	1
Canada	4	-	-	25	29[a]
Chad	6	-	-	120	126
Côte d'Ivoire	8	1	15	210	234
Egypt	8	-	85	119	212
France	-	7	-	-	7
Gabon	8	-	-	120	128[b]
Mali	5	6	-	119	130
Portugal	-	2	-	-	2
Senegal	9	3	-	120	132
Togo	6	-	-	120	126
Tunisia	-	2	-	-	2
Total	60	24	100	1 073	1 257

[a] The figures do not include national support elements (22).

[b] In addition to the Force Commander.



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